

Message Text

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SUBJECT: VISIT TO U.S. OF VENEZUELAN ENERGY GROUP ("MORTON OFFER")

REF: CARACAS 4268; STATE 19663

SUMMARY: THE U.S. EXPERIENCE OF HIGH-LEVEL VENEZUELAN ENERGY GROUP WAS GENERALLY POSITIVE, BUT CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE VISIT ARE DISQUIETING AND THE POST REQUESTS FURTHER INFORMATION. END SUMMARY.

1. THE HIGH-LEVEL TEAM OF VENEZUELAN ENERGY EXPERTS WAS A FIRST RESPONSE ON THE PART OF THE U.S. TO AN OFFER MADE BY THEN-SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR ROGERS MORTON AT A VENEZUELAN/AMERICAN SEMINAR HELD IN BOSTON IN EARLY 1975. THIS OFFER TO SHARE U.S. ENERGY TECHNOLOGY WITH VENEZUELAN EXPERTS WAS SUBSEQUENTLY REPEATED BY SECRETARY KISSINGER AT THE SECOND VENEZUELAN/AMERICAN SEMINAR HELD IN VENEZUELA IN FEBRUARY 1976. BECAUSE OF THE STATURE OF THE PERSONS MAKING THE OFFER, THE HIGH LEVEL OF THE VENEZUELANS ACCEPTING THE OFFER, AND BECAUSE IT WAS A FIRST STEP IN AN AMBITIOUS PROGRAM LINKED WITH THE TRANSFER OF TECHNOLOGY, THE POST HAD ACCORDED THE VISIT HIGH PRIORITY.

2. GIVEN THE ABOVE, THE POST IS DISTURBED BY AN APPARENT CONFUSION ON PROGRAMMING. THE DEPARTMENT HAS FORWARDED (STATE 19663) TO THE POST

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A PROPOSED PROGRAM FOR THE VENEZUELAN ENERGY PROJECT. THE DEPARTMENT'S

SUGGESTIONS WERE SUBMITTED TO THE GOV, AND THE RESPONSE REGARDING THE ITINERARY THAT EACH ONE OF THE PARTICIPANTS WAS TO FOLLOW WAS CABLED TO THE DEPARTMENT ON APRIL 13 (CARACAS 4268). ALTHOUGH SOME OF THE ORIGINALLY NOMINATED PARTICIPANTS COULD NOT TRAVEL AND SUBSTITUTIONS WERE NAMED, THE EMBASSY IN EACH CASE POINTED OUT WHICH ITINERARY

THEY WERE TO FOLLOW.

3. ACCORDING TO DR. LUIS MATA, WHEN THE GROUP MET WITH THE PROGRAM OFFICE AT THE VISITOR'S PROGRAM SERVICE OF THE MERIDIAN HOUSE INTERNATIONAL, THE PROGRAM AGENCY HAD NO INFORMATION WHATSOEVER ON THE SUGGESTED ITINERARIES, NOR HAD ANY ADVANCE PROGRAMMING BEEN DONE. SINCE

THERE WAS INSUFFICIENT TIME TO PLAN THE PROMISED INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMMING AT THAT POINT, A GROUP PROGRAM WAS DEVELOPED. THIS WAS NOT SATISFACTORY TO THE PARTICIPANTS. AS THE INTERPRETER'S REPORT POINTS OUT, "MEETINGS ATTENDED BY ALL THE MEMBERS OFTEN MEANT THAT SEVERAL OF THEM WERE GOING TO BE BORED."

4. THE POST FOUND THE PROGRAMMING PREPARATION FOR THIS GROUP GENERALLY

INADEQUATE GIVEN THEIR LEVEL OF SOPHISTICATION AND PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

IN THE U.S. IN CONVERSATIONS DURING THE PLANNING STAGES OF THE "MORTON OFFER" TRIP, GOV OFFICIALS HAD STRESSED "IF THIS IS JUST ANOTHER TOURIST TRIP TO THE U.S., WE ARE NOT INTERESTED; WE HAVE ALL BEEN THERE BEFORE. WE WANT A HARD-HITTING TECHNICAL PROGRAM WHICH WILL MEET OUR SPECIFIC NEEDS AND INTERESTS." APPARENTLY THE PROGRAM ARRANGED DID NOT MEET THESE GOALS.

5. A FURTHER PROBLEM IN PROGRAMMING EMERGED IN THE INTERPRETER'S REPORT. MR. JORGE ROJAS WAS REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN DISAPPOINTED THAT HE COULD NOT VISIT SAN FRANCISCO'S BART SYSTEM, BECAUSE HE WAS NOT IDENTIFIED DIRECTLY WITH A TRANSPORTATION FIELD. IN ACTUAL FACT, MR. ROJAS HAD JUST BEEN NAMED PROJECT ENGINEER FOR THE BILLION DOLLAR CARACAS METRO ON WHICH A NUMBER OF LARGE U.S. COMPANIES ARE BIDDING, AND HAD THE PROGRAMMING AGENCY TAKEN THE TIME TO INQUIRE WHY MR. ROJAS

WAS INTERESTED IN BART, THIS PROBLEM MIGHT ALSO HAVE BEEN RESOLVED.
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6. THE POST IS CONCERNED WITH THE POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT OCCURRED

DURING THE GROUP'S MIT VISIT. THE REPORTED REFUSAL OF TWO MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY (PROFESSORS FESHBECK AND RASMUSSEN) TO RECEIVE THE VISITORS, IN FESHBECK'S CASE BECAUSE "THEY WERE TRAVELING UNDER STATE DEPARTMENT AUSPICES," IS CAUSE FOR CONCERN. THE FACT THAT THIS INFORMATION WAS PASSED TO THE VISITORS IS DISTURBING.

7. THE INTERPRETER'S REPORT DESCRIBES THE MOOD AT MIT AS ONE OF "COOLNESS AND SECRECY AND A RELUCTANCE TO SHARE IDEAS." AN EXPLANATION OF WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED AT MIT WOULD BE MOST WELCOME.

8. DESPITE THE ABOVE PROBLEMS, THE TRIP WAS DESCRIBED GENERALLY BY THE PARTICIPANTS AS POSITIVE. SEVERAL OF THEM WERE ABLE TO SUPPLEMENT THE OFFICIAL PROGRAM WITH ADDITIONAL MEETINGS ARRANGED BY FRIENDS AND FORMER COLLEAGUES AT SOME OF THE SITES.

9. ALL THE PARTICIPANTS FOUND ONE OR MORE OF THE ASPECTS OF THE VISIT PROFESSIONALLY BENEFICIAL AND ALL GAINED SOMETHING FROM THE EXPERIENCE. PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANT FROM THE POST'S VIEWPOINT, WAS THE ASSESSMENT OF DR. MATA, EXPRESSED IN A CONVERSATION AFTER HIS RETURN, THAT THE TRIP HAD "ESTABLISHED THE FOUNDATION FOR A BROAD SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE U.S. AND VENEZUELA." MATA ALSO CONSIDERS THIS "THE MOST IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENT OF THE VISIT."
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